

# Telltale signs that can help you to save a life

## Depression is common, but if you know what to watch for, you can stop it turning into suicide

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**M**OST people have moments when they feel sad. That's normal. But if the feeling of sadness persists for more than two weeks, it is likely you are depressed.

This, alongside symptoms such as inability to sleep or eat, poor personal hygiene and withdrawal from activities, is the basis for the diagnosis of depression, says Naazia Ismail, project manager at the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (Sadag).

One in three people suffers from a mental health problem, says Ismail, and depression is one of the more common.

She was speaking following the death of Westville Senior Primary School principal Eugene de Bruyn, 52, who had been at the school for 16 years. His body was found on the school premises by the caretaker on Monday morning. It is believed he hanged himself.

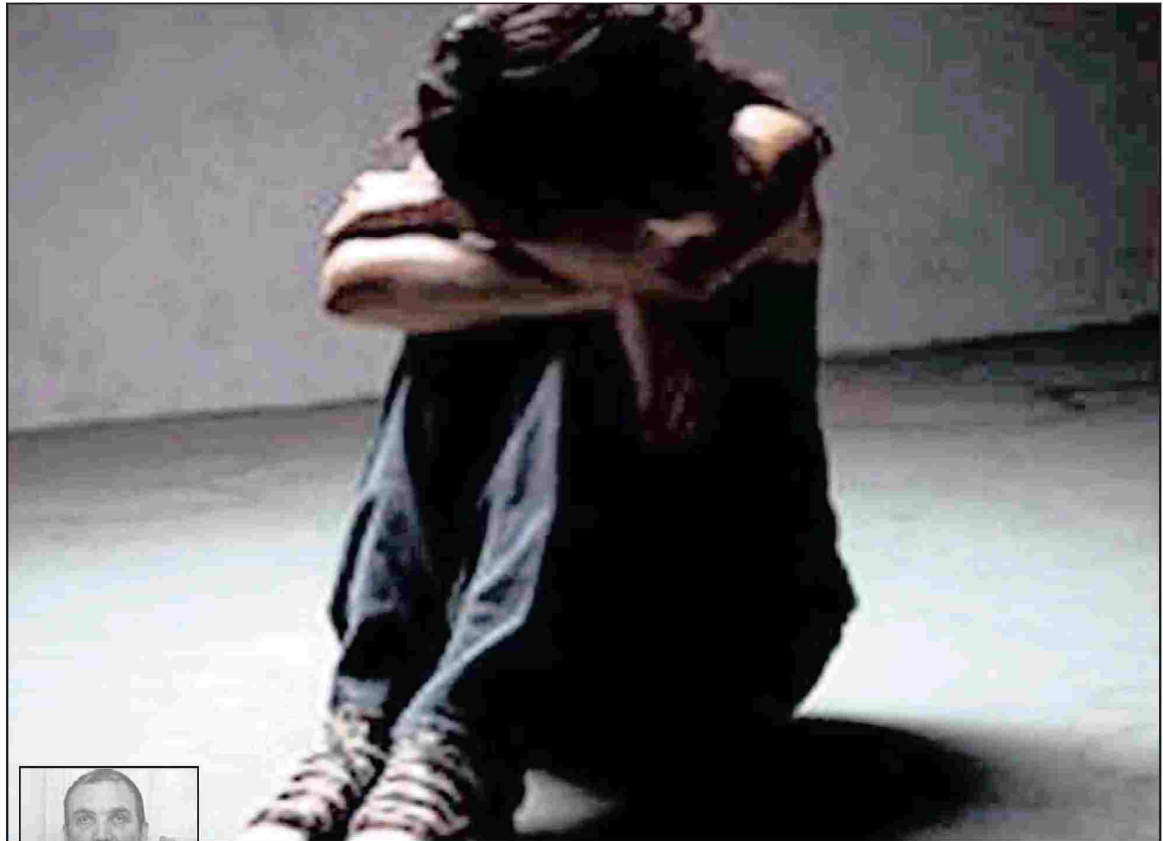
Colleagues said De Bruyn had suffered emotionally since the death of his wife from cancer about six years ago. He was said to have been booked off for depression for a term last year.

Ismail said one of the triggers for depression was a major change in a person's life. It could affect people of all ages, economic backgrounds and those under stress, she said.

Despite its prevalence there was a stigma, which could stop people from seeking help.

Those close to the affected person were advised to watch for symptoms indicating their friend, colleague or relative was suffering from depression or a related mental health issue.

"If the person is not eating or sleeping properly, is withdrawn from their family and friends, doesn't interact with people and seclude themselves – that is a first sign. Other physical signs include headaches, backaches, a sore body and dizziness



**A CRY FOR HELP:** One in three South Africans has a mental health problem and depression is one of the more common ones. Police confirmed the recent death by suicide of Westville Senior Primary School principal Eugene de Bruyn, 52, inset left. He is believed to have been depressed after his wife's death six years ago.

– all usually linked to a lack of sleep and good nutrition," said Ismail.

She emphasised that a person needed to display between six and eight symptoms before they could be diagnosed as depressed, and seek professional help from a counsellor.

Suicide could be a risk if help was not sought, she said.

"When it comes to suicide, close to 80 percent of people show signs of wanting to commit suicide before

they actually do it, and this is something family and friends need to look out for as well," said Ismail.

She said a person would usually begin to give away their clothing or other valuable items, begin to sort out their financial affairs, such as updating their will or creating one, and begin to talk of things such as heaven and death.

"Our message is that relatives, colleagues and friends need to pay atten-

tion to people close to them and look out for the warning signs. Be supportive and make sure they know you are there for them. Tell them that being depressed is not a sign of weakness, and intervene before someone takes the drastic step of committing suicide," she said.

Sadag counsellors for mental health problems are available on 080 070 8090.